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ABSTRACT

By following the "steppingstone" or marker theory of dividing one's life into no more than 12 and no less than 8 significant periods, a student in a writing course can develop a brief response for each phase to articulate multiple experiences. Writing teachers can aid students in realizing that important life experiences are the stuff of which literature is made. This, in turn, often awakens in students an interest in literature, so eager are they to see the metaphors writers use to describe their own vivid experiences. To delve into the inner life--pursuing dreams, doing free writing, fantasizing, creating patterns--the diary or journal can be used for the quest of identity in unravelling a student's autobiography. It will frequently yield experiences that can be defined in archetypal patterns, such as death-rebirth, initiation, or quest. Thoreau transformed the experience of sounding the depths of Walden Pond to sounding the depths of his own self; he later imposed order on those experiences and produced "Walden," one of the most affirmative death-rebirth books in literature. Moving from the subjective to the objective, learning can occur, and students studying essay models and literature can learn to relate the private world to the public world. (An "illustrious monarchy" was a metaphor used by Ralph Waldo Emerson to describe the inner life of the individual.) (NKA)

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SHAPING THE SELF: USING STEPPINGSTONES AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY TO CREATE AND DISCOVER ARCHETYPES IN "AN ILLUSTRIOUS MONARCHY"

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SHAPING THE SELF: USING STEPPINGSTONES AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY TO CREATE AND DISCOVER ARCHETYPES IN "AN ILLUSTRIOUS MONARCHY"

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> The private life of one man shall be a more illustrious monarchy, more formidable to its enemy, more sweet and serene in its influence to its friend, than any kingdom in history.[1]
>
> Ralph Waldo Emerson

In "The American Scholar" essay, an address presented to the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard in 1837, Emerson discusses the influence of the private life and suggests that "a man, rightly viewed, comprehendeth the particular nature of all men."[2] Is this concept a forerunner of Carl Jung's theory of archetypes? Is Emerson saying that as we explore ourselves, we will learn to understand others? Or, in the language of the 1983 Call to Convention of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, we can assert that

> students grow as they learn to move outside themselves to become more themselves. It is a process of emergence, divergence, and convergence of worlds in motion.[3]

Emerson was noted for distinguishing the world of "Me" from everything else, the world of "Not me." Yet he also said that it is "one soul which animates all men."[4]

> This world--this shadow of the soul, or other me--lies wide around. Its attractions are the keys which unlock my thoughts and make me acquainted with myself. I run eagerly to this resounding tumult. I grasp the hands of those next me [sic], and take my place in the ring to suffer and to work.[5]

Although Emerson speaks of "man," this argument is that he was using the word to speak of generic man; I shall refer to all people in this discussion of a method for the quest of identity in unravelling a student's autobiography.

Thoreau executed some of the practical applications of the theory of microcosm and macrocosm in Walden. As private and public worlds collide, clash, and sometimes mesh, we can see how the journal can be a tool to develop an autobiography. Techniques such as Ira Progoff's "Steppingstone" exercise can facilitate the journey into oneself. The journey will frequently yield experiences that can be defined in archetypal patterns, such as death-rebirth, initiation or quest.

Archetypes are basic patterns from which copies are made. According to Jung, an archetype is the following:

> a figure, whether it be daemon, man or process, that repeats itself in the course of history wherever creative fantasy is fully manifested. If we subject these images to a closer investigation, we discover them to be the formulated resultants of countless experiences of our

> ancestors. They are, as it were, the psychic residue of numberless experiences of the same type.[6]

A corollary to the theory of archetypes is that "literary expression is an unconscious product of the collective experience of the entire human species."[7] The metaphors we choose to describe our experiences may differ, but we all are initiated into new knowledge, experience death-rebirth, undertake various tasks, and have some explanation for our origin/creation myth. Thus, when someone like Thoreau talks about going to Walden Pond in 1845 to "live deep and suck out all the marrow of life,"[8] we can assume he will sound the depths not only of the pond but also of his inner life.

At the outset, I want to clarify that when I say archetypal patterns, I do not attach male patterns to the quest, initiation, or death-rebirth patterns. Although Jung has been criticized by some for speaking of males, I would agree with Annis Pratt in "Archetypal Approaches to the New Feminist Criticism":

> On the one hand, my sister critics have urged me to avoid the Jungian-archetypal mode on the grounds that Jung has so grossly erred in his allocation of stereotyped characteristics to male and female that his concepts are totally invalid for our endeavor; on the other hand, I find that the insights of Jung, Frye, and Campbell, if turned upside down to admit of women as human participants in the quest for identity and rebirth experience, are helpful in the elucidation of the psycho-mythological development of the female hero.[9]

Who is this hero? The "thinking reed," a human being. Author-editors Pearson and Pope in Who Am I This Time? distinguish "hero" as an active quester and heroine as a passive one.[10] For the purposes of our discussion, we will assume the hero is an active searcher, which is the archetypal pattern. He/she possess both anima and animus. A representative example is Mrs. Ramsay, a quester in To the Lighthouse

> who calls up from within herself sufficiently androgynous powers to fertilize her childish husband. As a result of this psychic effort she plunges down to a world where, as Jung described it, the true self calls into balance both male and female, anima and animus, resident in the personality. Having been able to complete this rebirth journey, Mrs. Ramsay dies. . . . In Woolf, as in Lessing, the quest of the hero passes through sexuality and what Simone de Beauvoir would term immanence to a level which at one and the same time comprehends and transcends male and female categories.[11]

The level, whether transcendent or a deep well, is a stage beyond male or female. Joanna Field in A Life of One's Own calls it "psychic bisexuality."[12] Charlotte Painter in the Afterward to Revelations defines that as Field's distinctive ability:

> She was able then to see that her happiness depended entirely upon developing skill at balancing these two sexes within her mind, at learning how to distinguish when one or the other needs to be brought into plan, and as the demands of life's ever changing situations arose, she could call upon the rational, narrow-focused, analytical, "masculine," side of her mind, or the wide-focused, yielding, receptive, "feminine side." In such a context,

> this familiar terminology, which has angered feminists who do not wish to be stereotyped, now becomes disarmed; it is merely descriptive, not restrictive.[13]

To discover within ourselves when and how to call upon these functions, I propose the Steppingstone technique of Ira Progoff. In At a Journal Workshop, he defines a "Steppingstone" as a

> specific occurrence or situation which comes to the fore of our minds when we go back over the past and review the movement of our lives.[14]

Progoff details a specific method to follow in developing the Steppingstones or markers. After establishing the "now Moment," he suggests listing no more than twelve and no less than eight significant periods into which one's life can be divided.

> A Steppingstone period is a unit of Life/Time, a period in our life in which many varied experiences are contained. The period as a whole is symbolized by . . . the particular Steppingstone event which represents the primary and governing quality of that time in our life.[15]

After the Steppingstones or markers have been listed, the writer develops a brief response for each one; the response begins with the phrase, "It was a time when . . ." Using this technique, I started a course in aviation literature in the fall of 1981 at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona. The results of the exercise astounded me. Initially, my idea was to teach students to keep a subjective journal as well as an

objective, written log of flights. I was not expecting to produce another Antoine de Saint-Exupery with a prose style like Wind, Sand and Stars, but I wanted my students to be able to articulate their multiple experiences. I hypothesized that one of their Steppingstone periods would have something to do with their choice of career (aviation): their quest. In all cases I was correct. The rest of their choices dealt with death-rebirth, initiation, etc. One student wrote of his plane icing up while he transported the Doobie Brothers to a singing engagement: he transformed his understanding of the moment to a death-rebirth pattern. Another student wrote of the death of his brother, an initiation experience he had never discussed before.

My theory behind this course was that as I could aid my students in seeing that their significant life experiences were the stuff of which literature is made, they might acquire more interest in literature, something woefully lacking in students today, as everyone tells us. My supposition proved to be correct: personal as well as critical patterns emerged into initiation, journey, death-rebirth and quest patterns. Students read avidly to see what metaphors others used to describe similar experiences.

I have not only tried this approach on a mixed group of pilots, but I have also found that it works with re-entry

women and men as well as traditional students. Everyone has a story to tell. In the fall of 1977 Diane Ranney and I taught an experimental course at Yavapai College entitled "Women's Autobiographies." One student in that class produced eleven pages in response to a final question about mothers, an archetypal character. We spent much of that semester on the pattern of mothers: the students' final examination question was to write about Anne Sexton's poem: "A woman is her mother; that's the main thing."

Another semester I had a young student in an independent study course who wrote the last chapter in her autobiography. She developed an acute sense of time as she realized how she could change her life now to avoid the conclusion she had created. Perhaps this sense of time is different; we create, but we also discover and change, not only what has happened, but our angles of vision that illuminate different aspects: our perception of time is multifaceted. Joanna Field said of her journal that the "growth of understanding follows an ascending spiral rather than a straight line."[16]

To delve into that inner life--pursuing dreams, capturing twilight images, doing free writing, brainstorming, fantasizing, dialoguing, creating patterns--what could be more engaging? Marty Martin hypothesizes that Gertrude Stein might have said that the inner life is the individual:

> But it is that inner life it is that one it is that thing--that is the actual life of the individual.[17]

We can use the diary or journal to "lower the barrier to the primal self . . . to function positively as part of the total being."[18] Joseph Campbell considers

> imaginative work as a quest, and the artist as a quester. "In all the myths of adventure the hero starts out innocently looking for something lost or following an animal into the forest, and before he knows it he is in a place nobody has ever been before that is filled with monsters or demons that may destroy him." And having entered the regions of the unconscious, the artist responds "to the need to escape from this danger and chaos . . . and deals with his 'interior difficulties' by organizing his life on a higher level than before."[19]

Art, not just poetry, as Frost has said, can be a "momentary stay against confusion." We create order--or patterns. For example, Emerson, on seeing shells on a beach, was excited to take them home. But when he arrived there, the shells had lost their composition. To see them wet on the beach was part of the order. Journals--leading to autobiography--can help us to see patterns. Virginia Woolf said in A Writer's Diary in 1934:

> Odd how the creative power at once brings the whole universe to order. I can see the day whole, proportioned--even after a long flutter of the brain.[20]

I suggest that those patterns are often archetypal, rooted deep in the unconscious. Florida Scott-Maxwell, writing of her imminent death, said:

> The most important thing in my life was the rich experience of the unconscious. This was a gift life gave me and I only had the sense to honor and serve it. It taught me that we are fed by great forces, and I know that I am in the hands of what seemed immortal.[21]

Death-rebirth: great forces. As we develop our Stepping-stones and create our autobiographies, we find that we join in a procession of voyagers that is centuries old. In the 1983 4 C's Conference Call to Convention, it speaks about writers who "shape and reshape our individual and collective victories and visions."[22] So, too, we are about the business of trying to understand our place in space on this planet Earth. Thoreau lived at Walden for over two years. He kept copious journals; Edward Abbey, who has written 17 journals, says, "I don't know if I'll ever catch up to Thoreau."[23] Thoreau transformed the experience of sounding the depths of Walden Pond to sounding the depths of his own self; he later re-created or imposed order on those experiences and produced Walden, one of the most affirmative death-rebirth books in literature. He caught a universal process and the book has what Philip Wheelright says is the very essence of myth: "that haunting awareness of transcendental forces peering through the cracks of the visible universe."[24]

How to capture these forces? By working with the visible universe. Two assumptions to this journal and autobiographical approach exist. Learning is most vital

when it relates to us. By moving from the subjective to the objective, learning can occur. This premise is Ken Macrorie's in Searching Writing as he teaches students the I-search method[25] rather than the research method, which has been known to produce yet another lifeless, dull research paper on child abuse or abortion.

The second premise is that the initial spark of what relates to me as journal writer may move me to study essay models and literature; I will relate my private world to the public one. Our quest becomes personal, as Mary McCarthy says:

> Oh, I suppose everyone continues to be interested in the quest for the self, but what you feel when you're older, I think, is that--how to express this--that you really must make the self. It's absolutely useless to look for it, you won't find it, but it's possible in some sense to make it.[26]

As we make this self, we reveal layers of being, embarrassing emotions, fears, hopes, failures, triumphs. No one should value our experience with a grade, an essential requirement for this process to work at all. We must feel free to select randomly the steppingstones of our lives. We will not try to be as Benjamin Franklin, who wrote his autobiography as "a conscious literary creation presented for our emulation,"[27] according to Jesse Lemisch. Next year we will perhaps choose different steppingstones. But it is my contention that whenever and whatever markings we choose, they will be archetypal patterns, situations, or

characters. Perhaps we may even make it our business to create some of them into stories or poems, imposing yet another order. No one could expect more of a private life than it be "sweet and serene . . . an illustrious monarchy." Each one of us is illustrious, and our autobiography reflects that uniqueness. Joanna Field said we create a

> life, not as slow shaping of achievement to fit my preconceived purpose, but as the gradual discovery and growth of a purpose which I did now know.[28]

To be about the business of questing, searching, and discovering should keep us all busy as we daily compose our autobiography.

ENDNOTES

[1]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," in Masters of American Literature, Vol. I., ed. Leon Edel et al. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Riverside Press, 1959), p. 335.

[2]Emerson, p. 335.

[3]Conference Call to Convention of the 1983 Conference on College Composition and Communication, 34th Annual Meeting, March 17-19, 1983, Detroit, Michigan, n.d., n.p.

[4]Emerson, p. 335.

[5]Emerson, p. 330.

[6]Carl Jung in Lionel Trilling's criticism, unpublished handout of Erwin U. Wright, Stephens College, Columbia, Mo., n.d., p. 2.

[7]Carl Jung handout, p. 1.

[8]Henry David Thoreau, Walden in Concise Anthology of American Literature, ed. George McMichael (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), p. 728.

[9]Annis Pratt, "Archetypal Approaches to the New Feminist Criticism," Bucknell Review, Vol. 21 (1973), p. 3.

[10]Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope, Who Am I This Time? Female Portraits in British and American Literature (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1976), p. 248.

[11]Pratt, p. 13.

[12]Charlotte Painter, "Psychic Bisexuality," Afterword to Revelations: Diaries of Women, ed. Mary Jane Moffat and Charlotte Painter (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), p. 395.

[13]Painter, p. 395.

[14]Ira Progoff, At a Journal Workshop: The Basic Text and Guide for Using the Intensive Journal (New York: Dialogue House Library, 1975), p. 120.

[15]Progoff, p. 120.

[16]Painter, p. 393.

[17]Marty Martin, Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein (New York: Random House, 1980), p. 10.

[18]Painter, p. 398-99.

[19]Painter, p. 399.

[20]Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary in 1982 Virginia Woolf Calendar: Diary, ed. Martha H. Starr and Elizabeth W. Hill (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), n.p.

[21]Florida Scott-Maxwell in Revelations: Diaries of Women, ed. Mary Jane Moffat and Charlotte Painter (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), p. 365.

[22]Conference Call to Convention, n.d., n.p.

[23]Edward Abbey, in "He Tries to Force Choices," Irma Valasco, Arizona Magazine of Arizona Republic, September 12, 1982, p. 26.

[24]Philip Wheelwright in "Myth," Mark Schorer, unpublished handout of Erwin U. Wright, Stephens College, Columbia, Mo., n.d., p. 1.

[25]Ken Macrorie, Searching Writing (Rochelle Park, New Jersey: Hayden Book Company, 1980), p. 56.

[26]Mary McCarthy in Searching Writing, Ken Macrorie (Rochelle Park, New Jersey: Hayden Book Company, 1980), p. 8.

[27]Jesse Lemisch, Introduction to Benjamin Franklin: The Autobiography and Other Writings, Benjamin Franklin (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. vii.

[28]Joanna Field, A Life of One's Own in Revelations: Diaries of Women, ed. Mary Jane Moffat and Charlotte Painter (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), p. 357.

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